

Idaho Energy Buzz
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By Michael Keckler, Public Information Officer, Idaho Department of Water Resources

Farm Bill Grants Available for Renewable Energy Development

If you are a farmer or own a small rural business, and the monthly energy bills are becoming a burden, there is federal money available to help you build your own energy source. The Idaho Energy Division, the United States Department of Agriculture, and other partners are sponsoring a series of workshops this month across Southern Idaho to help guide people through the application process for obtaining a renewable energy grant.

The funds are included in the USDA Farm Bill and can be used to build a small wind power turbine, tap geothermal water, or install a ground source heat pump in a home or business. “The Farm Bill funds could be the difference to move a project from a plan to reality,” said Idaho Energy Division Administrator Bob Hoppie. “It’s a real opportunity and these workshops are intended to help Idahoans take advantage of it.”

A small 20 to 25-kilowatt wind turbine can easily be constructed next to a rural home or business. The turbine will generate electricity to meet your home or business needs, over time, balancing what you generate with what you use – a process called “net-metering”. Within the first ten years the turbine can pay for itself and henceforth – provide low cost electricity.

Utilizing heat from the earth is another way to drastically reduce your home heating costs. Ground source heat pumps take advantage of the relatively mild and constant temperatures a few feet below the earth’s surface producing low-cost heating and cooling. Compared to natural gas, a ground source heat pump can cut heating costs by two-thirds and propane costs even more.

The Farm Bill grants can go a long way to help with initial costs but the deadline is fast approaching. Applications must be submitted to USDA Rural Development by March 1, 2006. Preliminary grant applications are due to Idaho USDA by February 1, 2006. The workshops will include information on how to file successful applications and who can help you do it.

The workshop will focus on wind and geothermal resources, but experts will also be on hand to answer questions about bio-energy and solar power opportunities in Idaho.

Workshop Schedule:

- **Boise** - January 18, 2006, 1:30 pm – 4:30 pm, Best Western Vista Inn at the Airport, Bitterroot Room, 2645 Airport Way
- **Twin Falls** – January 19, 2006, 9:00 am – Noon, AmeriTel Inn, Blue Lakes Room, 1377 Blue Lakes Blvd. N
- **Pocatello** – January 19, 2006, 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm, Red Lion, Teton Room, 1550 Pocatello Creek Road
- **Idaho Falls** – January 20, 2006, 9:00 am – Noon, Red Lion on the Falls, Bannock Room, 475 River Parkway
- **Cascade** – January 25, 2006, 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm, Ashley Inn, Tamarack Room, 500 N. Main St.

The workshops are free and open to the public. Registration will be at the door.

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